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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000622

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, NEA/PPD MACINNES AND PAGNEW, NEA/ARP  
CKANESHIRO  
SECDEF FOR OASD/PA  
USCINCCENT FOR PAO AND POLAD  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH AND HAMBLEY; PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BAHRAINI MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQI POW TREATMENT

1. Summary: For the past three days, all five Bahraini daily newspapers have run front-page stories with banner headlines, photos of Iraqi POWs being mistreated, and columns about the mistreatment of Iraqi POWs. Writers and opinion leaders have questioned U.S. values of democracy and human rights. Bahrainis are also comparing Arab satellite coverage of the issue with coverage on CNN and BBC World. One managing editor told the PAO that Arabs no longer trust CNN or BBC to report accurately on what is happening in the region - they only trust the Arab satellite channels. Many Bahrainis believe that the mistreatment of Iraqi POWs is much more widespread than what has been reported in the U.S. media. They believe that prisoners in Guantanamo and Afghanistan have also been subjected to torture. End summary.

2. EDITORIAL COMMENT/BLOCK QUOTES:

SEMI-INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY "AKHBAR AL-KHALIJ," 5/3, COLUMNIST ABDULLA AL-AYOUBI (Bahraini columnist who is a moderate advocate of reforms, even from the U.S.):

"I believed only one thing that Bush said when he commented on the pictures of tortured Iraqis. I believed him when he said that these actions did not represent the American people. Apart from that comment, everything else he said about the photos was a lie. We know that the American people would never accept such practices. That is why the American people were against the war in Vietnam and are now against the war in Iraq."

INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY "AL WASAT," 5/3, COLUMNIST WALEED NOUEIHED (Managing editor of Al Wasat, a moderate intellectual, used to work for Al Hayat in London.):

"The pictures of tortured and degraded Iraqi prisoners should not be surprising or shocking because this war started with a lie. Why wouldn't Americans lie about the values of their soldiers? The disgusting pictures are a direct message to Arabs who have been fascinated with the Western model and the American way of life. All American values are fake. If these mercenaries, who came all the way from the U.S. just to fulfill their racism against Muslims and Arabs, do this at Abu Ghraib prison, why would they not commit similar crimes against mosques and holy shrines and then accuse Islamist groups for carrying out these activities?"

INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY "AL WASAT," 5/3, JOURNALIST TAMAM ABU SAFI (A moderate, twenty-something journalist, usually pro-Western.):

"I was not as disgusted by the photographs of Iraqi POWs as much as I was disgusted by the reaction of President Bush on this issue. Didn't he expect these actions from soldiers who joined the army because they failed in their studies? The question is what will pro-American Iraqis say about the U.S. occupation in Iraq now? Will they still say that U.S. actions are the democratic tools for a free Iraq?"

SEMI-INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY "AKHBAR AL-KHALIJ" 5/3, BY COLUMNIST SAMEERA RAJAB (anti-American Bahraini columnist):

"Torturing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison is a war crime and sets a very dangerous precedent. These pictures in the media -- and many more posted on the internet, including Iraqi women prisoners being raped by British and American soldiers -- confirm the atrocities that happen everyday, not only in Iraq but also in Guantanamo. The American scandals and crimes have begun to be revealed. the legend of American democracy and human rights are mere illusions."

SEMI-INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY "AKHBAR AL-KHALIJ" 5/4, COLUMNIST SAYED ZAHRA (anti-American Egyptian columnist):

"Everybody in the world, including American and British leaders, expressed their shock about the photographs of

torture, as if they did not know of the atrocious crimes their soldiers have been committing in Iraq. If the world wants to know who the real criminals are, they will find them in the White House and at 10 Downing Street. They are not the seven or eight soldiers who tortured the prisoners. They are the leaders of America and Britain. If the international community has a conscience and keenness to protect human rights, all crimes against Iraqis must be independently investigated."

13. Minimize considered.

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